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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST, IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, March 1, focus on domestic issues, including Parliament's rejection of the temporary law for the Higher Media Council and the King and Queen's business trip to Europe. A lead story in Al-Dustour highlights Arab conflict over U.S.' Initiative for a Greater Middle East as presented in the failure of the Arab League to agree on a draft project to be presented at the upcoming Tunis summit meeting on the Initiative.

Editorial Commentary on Iraqi Constitution

-- "The constitution to Destroy Iraq"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/01): "This draft [of the Iraqi constitution] is a recipe for civil war and not a document for transitioning into a stable and safe Iraq.. The draft seems to have been distinctively written with a Kurdish pen. The draft constitution, in points (d) and (e) drives a very serious wedge for a conflict between the Arabs and the Kurds. Point (d) postpones a decision on the fate of 'disputed' areas until after the general census is done; if the majority in subject area is Kurdish, then it belongs to the district of Kurdistan. Point (e) states that 'effects of arabization and demographic change that were affected by previous Iraqi governments' are to be removed! If we take the Kurdish armed control of these areas into consideration, then this constitutes a clear invitation for ethnic cleansing against the Arabs in those areas before a general census is to take place. Is it logical for a temporary constitution to contain such text? This is a recipe for civil war, not for the security, stability and unity of Iraq.. We have always been sympathetic with the right of Kurds who have suffered oppression, not to mention the Halabja massacre that shocked everyone. But in my view, the Kurds' historical right in Iraq, Turkey and Iran lies in the establishment of a state of their own. With international circumstances the way they are, dividing them between their countries, and with the reality of their current citizenship to these three countries not likely to change, then it is not right for Iraq to be made to suffer the consequences of the Kurdish problem and be divided and destroyed as a result."

Editorial Commentary on the Initiative for a Greater Middle East

-- "What comes after rejecting 'reform' coming from without?"

Daily columnist Bater Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/01): "The Arab world, with all its political, cultural, official and popular components, has never agreed on anything as it has on rejecting the Greater Middle East project proposed by the U.S. administration as a tool for democratic reform in the Arab world.. There are three major incentives for rejecting the American project led by three political and cultural entities in the Arab world. The first stance stems from a cultural-ideological rejection of the concept of democracy and political pluralism and respect for the opinions of others, is based on the illusion of knowing the truth and having supremacy of opinions, and is represented by Islamic parties, nationalists and some other leftist groups that are opposed to all proposals put forth by the United States. The second stance is that of the official Arab regime that is afraid for its political gains and privileges from foreign pressures and wants to defend

oppression and the absence of freedoms and pluralism by pretending to defend so-called 'Arab distinctiveness' from foreign change. The third stance is that of neo-liberal democratic leftist groups in the Arab world, myself included, who believe that democracy, pluralism, public freedoms, justice and development are the only way to bring reform to the Arab world, but who are confident that the United States could never be a credible leader on this path.. Rejecting reform from without is the right thing to do, but it must not be the conclusion. Political and cultural reform, which we understand as inclusive of political pluralism, launching public freedoms, combating corruption, educating society and strengthening the self-making abilities of the Arab world, is demanded by the Arab world. The Arab world should not remain stuck in this currently-standing dual state of absence of freedoms due to totalitarianism on one hand and foreign occupation on another."

-- "The American democratic project . why not?

Columnist Mohammad Subeihi writes on the op-ed page of semi-official influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (03/01): "Most of the opposition to the American project for democratic reforms in the Middle East are not innocent or nationally-driven. They mean to defend the dictatorships and the oppression of freedoms and political rights of the Arab citizens. It is clear that ruling regimes and parties in many parts of the Arab world have mobilized writers to attack the American project under the pretext of hidden American intentions for hegemony that range from claiming the unsuitability of western democracy for our societies to saying that democracy cannot be imposed from without but from within.. It is not a secret that the American project is receiving the support of many of the intellectuals and political figures, not because it is American, but because oppression and totalitarianism have led the learned political sector to a stage where it accepts an alliance with the devil in order to rid itself of the corruption and oppression that is eating away at Arab societies. The common denominator between the American project and the political reality of the Arab people is that democracy and pluralism, the sharing of authority and the elimination of corruption are the only means to protect Arab societies from religious extremism. Thus, many Arab political regimes would bury their heads in the sand if they can count on Arab societies' antagonism towards this project and ascribe its failure to its having come from America. In truth, the project enjoys significant support from the elite, although some would not say so out loud for fear of accusations of treason and treachery. If the United States teams up its project with an attempt to rein in Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and designating a major role for the United Nations in Iraq, then it would reap landslide support for its project for democratic reform in the Middle East."

-- "America spreading democracy . God have mercy!"

Columnist Bassam Umoush writes on the op-ed page of semi-official influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (03/01): "The U.S. administration allocated tens of millions of dollars for spreading democracy in the Middle East.. Where was the United States on this noble objective a hundred years ago? Where was it when dictatorships oppressed people, bombed cities, built prisons and built scaffolds? Where was it when an Arab regime used dangerous weapons against its own people? How is the United States going to supply us with canned democracy when it is occupying Iraq? Is its unlimited support for a foreigner regime that has come unto the lands of the dear Middle East and kicked the people out of Palestine not contradictory to American democracy?.. Yes, we do want democracy in the Middle East, but what America is exporting is the disease not the medicine."

GNEHM